



October 25, 2016

The Honorable Senator Murkowski
709 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Senator Sullivan
702 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Congressman Young
2314 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

RE: Rural Health Care Universal Services Support

Dear Senator Murkowski, Senator Sullivan, and Congressman Young:

I am writing on behalf of the Alaska Tribal Administrator's Association to ask for your support ensuring Alaskans continue to have access to affordable broadband telehealth services in rural and bush communities. For those communities who do not have affordable broadband telehealth services, we ask that access to those services be provided.

You may know the Rural Health Care Universal Service Support budget has remained static for 20 years and must be increased. The current \$400 million budget remains at the initial level set in 1997, despite inflation, advances in technology and increased demand for services. The FCC expects that demand may exceed the cap for the first time in funding year 2016. An equivalent budget today, adjusted for inflation, would be about \$600 million.

Rural Health Care Universal Service Support is essential to enable providers to deliver affordable broadband telehealth services in Alaska's rural and Bush communities. Alaska received more than \$82 million in rural health care support for 2015, a substantial increase from 2014.

If rural Alaskans are to continue to receive the affordable broadband telehealth services they need, the FCC must increase the rural health care budget and index it for inflation, as it recently did with E-rate. The FCC has updated the E-rate budget from \$2.25 billion in 1997 to \$3.94 billion for 2016, and indexed it for inflation, reflecting increases in demand.

Rural health care support enables telehealth services to be provided that dramatically improve access to care, accelerate diagnosis and treatment, avoid unnecessary medivacs, and expand local treatment options.

The Mission of ATAA is to develop a collaborative atmosphere of knowledge sharing and professional support among Alaska's Tribal Administrators; and to promote effective tribal administration resulting in greater self-governance, community sustainability, and leadership.

We work collaboratively with tribal organizations, tribal leadership and tribal staff to improve local access to quality medical/health care services. Affordable broadband is the most significant factor in the delivery of quality health care services through the use of telehealth tools. Without affordable broadband, many rural clinics across Alaska could not afford to use telehealth tools to provide and promote patient-centered health care and patient safety. In Alaska, telehealth is heavily utilized to connect patients with a higher level of care and specialty services. Using telehealth technologies is a key factor in avoiding high cost and travel stress on elders or as routinely happens, separating children from a parent who cannot afford to travel with their child.

We ask that you urge the FCC to increase the rural health care universal service support budget, index it for inflation, and provide for any unused funds to be carried forward to future funding years. This will ensure Alaska's rural and Bush communities continue to have access to affordable broadband telehealth services, critical for improving access to care.

Thank you for your support.

ALASKA TRIBAL ADMINISTRATORS ASSOCIATION

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'TJ', with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Teresa Jacobsson
Founder/Chair

CC: FCC Secretary and Staff